

## AFRICA'S UNDERDEVELOPMENT IS REPLENISHED BY THE IMF

**“The debt crisis in Africa was a direct result of exploitative lending practices by international financial institutions,”** declared Walter Rodney in his timeless book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.

In an Africa that operates from a place of confidence, one would expect a similar opening statement to lead any negotiations with international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Sadly, rather than setting the tone by firmly placing the responsibility for the continent's cyclical “debt crisis” and economic woes on lenders, too many of our economists (West-oriented, but that is a conversation for another day) and leaders find themselves negotiating from a position of need, dependence, and historical negligence.

### Kenya's (and Africa's) Gen Z Enter the Conversation

Interestingly, the intense protests against an IMF-backed Finance Bill and what transpired in cities across Kenya over the past few weeks is an indication that average Africans – young Africans to be exact – are no longer willing to accept “business as usual” vis a vis exploitative economic “advice”. The finance legislation pushed on Kenya, ostensibly aimed at implementing fiscal “reforms”, triggered widespread discontent among the population who perceived it as an overbearing economic policy at their own expense. They saw the exercise as forcing Kenya to “adjust” for the benefit of lenders.



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Adding fuel to this inferno, it was later disclosed that the IMF itself, during its “risk analysis”, had warned of potential discontent but advised the Government of Kenya to proceed with implementation despite the anticipated uproar. This of course raised eyebrows across the continent and reminded Africans that global institutions in charge of our “development” too often have objectives that run against our priorities, interests, and aspirations.

It is worth noting that, in addition to the Finance Bill, Kenyans, and global Africans supporting them, were also rejecting the country's wrong turn on two other key issues that many argue is related to financial incentives made through the IMF bill:

- sending police to Haiti (a country with a unique place in the annals of history as the first free Black nation)
- accepting a non-NATO ally designation.

### IMF and Africa: Fool Us.....How Many More Times?

IMF programs compel recipient countries to implement structural adjustment policies (although we are now told SAPs are a thing of the past) that supposedly aim to stabilize economies but often lead to more drastic social instability. These policies always include fiscal austerity, currency devaluation, privatization, and reduction of crucial public services. All of these measures disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. In many cases, such reforms deepen poverty, exacerbate inequality, and erode social safety nets, leading to widespread public dissatisfaction and unrest, which have been proven to sink countries into further economic and political instability.

Sadly, the situation in Nairobi is not isolated but part of a broader trend across Africa where IMF-sponsored financial programs have faced significant resistance. In Tanzania, a similar IMF-backed bill is looming, it is also expected to provoke similar public outcry. Earlier this year, both Ghana and Nigeria experienced protests against economic policies pushed by multilateral institutions, highlighting a continent-wide pattern of discontent and unrest in response to externally mandated economic reforms. The protests in Nairobi and elsewhere across the continent reflect a growing disillusionment with governance systems that prioritize international financial interests over local socio-economic wellbeing.

### Can Africa Think Outside the IMF Box?

The fact of the matter is that the collective West will never give up its control of these financial institutions where colonial-era ‘gentleman's agreement’ allows it free reign over policies that disproportionately and negatively affect the Global South.

It therefore becomes necessary to ask – beyond simply the push for “reform” of these financial architectures – can Africa survive without the IMF? That is the million-naira, million-kwacha, million-cedi, million-birr, million-shilling question.



Development Reimagined

The good news is that it is indeed possible – **Botswana, Eritrea & Libya** have proved so. The not so encouraging news is that Africans (especially the West-oriented economists mentioned earlier) are not churning out enough Africa-centered and Africans-led research that offers tangible policy recommendations for countries that want to join this exclusive club.